

A Community-Oriented Approach to School Libraries and Standards

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ASL's National School Library Standards (2018) encourage teacher librarians to “tailor your school library to local needs.” These standards reflect a shift in focus from a school-oriented approach to a more community-oriented perspective. School libraries are entrusted to help learners “practice civil discourse and cultural awareness by participating in local and global communities.” This emerging mission requires librarians to reach beyond the walls of their schools and collaborate with community members to address the standards.

From the small towns of the American West to the urban neighborhoods of the Northeast, each community has a unique history. Cultural heritage is the legacy of a particular group of people with specific attributes. Each community has a rich history that's often unknown to those who live there, particularly its children.

One of the most effective ways to bring this legacy alive is through primary sources, artifacts, visuals, and multimedia experiences, along with hands-on activities and interactions. Teacher librarians are well equipped to build the connections necessary to bring people and resources together.

SPARKING HUMANITIES CONVERSATIONS

Sparkling Humanities Conversations is a 3-year project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and a rural Utah nonprofit. The goal is to address the polarization that has become prevalent in rural communities by bringing people together to celebrate local history and shared cultural heritage.

Over a 2-year period, the project has explored a dozen thematic topics connected with cultural heritage. These topics resonated with community members of all ages. Rather than dictating the topics, members of the community were invited to vote for their choices through social media.

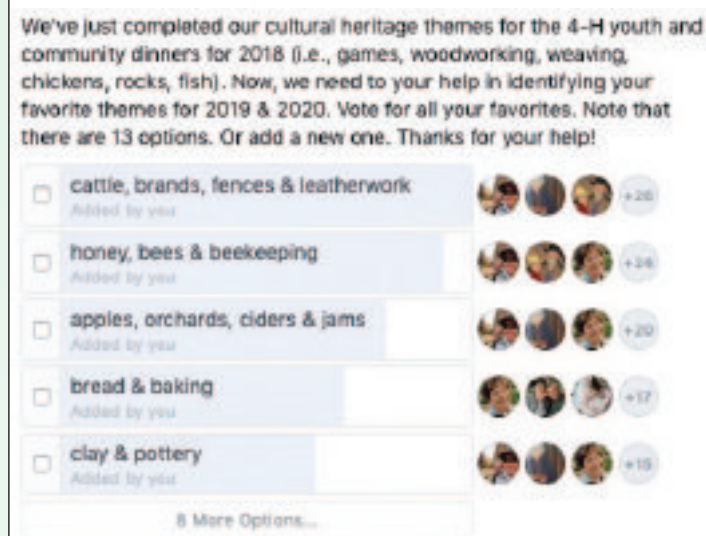


Figure 1. Facebook poll

Web-based resources, social media sites, and technology tools all play important parts of developing cultural heritage programming. For instance, members of the community were invited to submit their local historical photos. Then social media was used to help identify people in the photos. In one case, many members of the Fremont Brass Band from the late 19th century were identified. Children enjoyed learning about this band that traveled from town to town playing music. Some of the young people were even related to band members.



Figure 2. Fremont Brass Band

Let's explore a dozen cultural heritage themes that encourage local partnerships and build community connections.

1. GAMES AND GAMING: COLLECTING ORAL HISTORIES

People of all ages love games. Involving youth in oral history projects is an engaging way of connecting youth with local history.

Students learned that the local Southern Paiute children shared their games with the pioneers when they arrived. For instance, shinny is a ball and stick game played by members of the Southern Paiute tribe. An early settler now in his 90s remembered playing shinny with both pioneer children and Native American children. He demonstrated a stick game called guinea pig—using a cardboard paddle—as part of an oral history interview where senior citizens were asked about their memories of games growing up.



Figure 3. Oral history project

Technology Tip: No longer is special equipment needed to create short videos. Instead, use the video option on a still camera. Or use the built in camera that comes with most mobile devices such as tablets and cell phones. Keep videos short for easy access and use.

2. WOOD AND CRAFTING: IDENTIFYING EXPERTS

Whether focusing on the local timber industry or exploring the woodcraft of native peoples, a wood theme is an ef-

fective way to connect youth with their past.

Local experts are a valuable and often overlooked information source. State parks and museums, as well as national nonprofits and government agencies, have public relations people who are happy to talk with children. These community experts are just an email message, Facebook post, or phone call away.

The Heritage of Wood and Crafting theme featured a focus on the two national forests in the area and the local history of the timber industry. Representatives from the United States Forest Service, as well as the local lumber mill, were asked to share the past, present, and future of forests and how they connect with local residents.



Figure 4. US Forest Service representative

Technology Tip: Make use of agency web pages to locate contact information. Start with the “About” page or “Contact” page. Also look for a “Programs” page to see what educational materials might already be available. Facebook messaging is also a quick way to make contact.

3. BASKETS, RUGS, AND WEAVING: LOCATING HISTORICAL PHOTOS

From baskets to rugs, the craft of weaving has been a part of local history for centuries. Use historical photos to

chronicle this history for children.

Historical photo collections are an effective way to show students what life was like long ago. However, it's also possible to find a wealth of images in public domain books from sources such as **Internet Archive** <<https://archive.org>> and **HathiTrust** <<https://www.hathitrust.org/>>.

In 1902, Mattie Phipps Todd published **Hand-Loon Weaving**. This public domain book was scanned as part of Project Gutenberg and is available online. It contains dozens of photographs showing the act of weaving at the turn of the 20th century.

Ask local artisans to provide weaving demonstrations. Involve youth in making direct comparisons between the historical photos and the contemporary weavers.



Figure 5. Weaving photos, present and past

Technology Tip: In many cases, it's possible to download a PDF of a public domain book. This makes it easy to print out individual pages to show to students. Another approach is to use a browser's zoom option to enlarge a photo, then make a screen capture. This image can be printed or placed in a presentation.

4. CHICKENS: FINDING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Facebook, Instagram, and other social media tools are effective ways to reach out to the local community and gather

cultural heritage stories to share with children. Calls for participation can be placed on your school Instagram page, in your library e-newsletter, or on the community Facebook page.

In many rural areas, a community Facebook page is where people go to share local happenings. For each theme, a “request for memories” post was created featuring a local historical photo and a series of short questions to stimulate community conversation.

Laying hens have recently become popular across America. Children enjoy learning about the tradition of hatching, raising, and consuming chickens. A call for chicken memories elicited over 30 stories and photos covering a century. Participants shared stories about angry roosters, raising chickens, gathering eggs, and selling eggs on the roadside.



Figure 6. Facebook conversations

Technology Tip: Photos are the key to engaging social media users. Historical photos can trigger memories. Then use a couple of brief questions to elicit user responses.

5. ROCKS, MINES, AND COLLECTING: ACTIVATING INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Controversial topics can become the basis for community healing when explored through the lens of cultural heritage. While some mining practices have been harmful to the environment over the past century, panning for gold and rock collecting continue to be popular hobbies in rural America.

Historical newspapers are filled with articles from the late 19th century of the gold rush in the Henry Mountains of Utah. Articles, maps, photos, and other primary source documents are an opportunity for children to explore local lore about lost gold mines and mountain ghost towns. Every community has local legends. Students enjoy diving into the primary sources looking for evidence to support local lore.

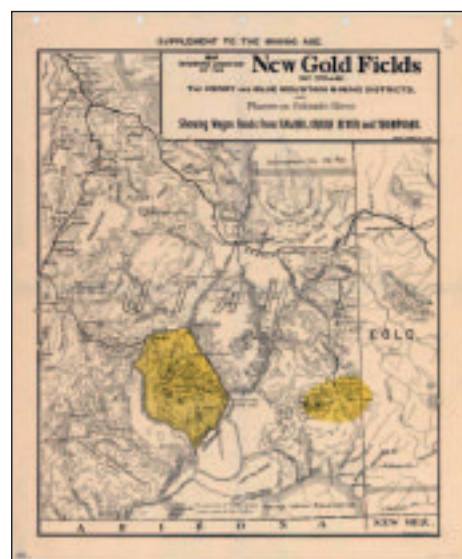


Figure 7. Historical map

Technology Tip: Use subscription databases to locate historical newspapers. You’ll also find many newspapers through the Library of Congress’s **Chronicling America** <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>> project.

6. FISH AND FISHING: BUILDING STEM SKILLS

When teachers think about cultural heritage, they often associate the topic with history. However, there are lots of opportunities for STEM activities.

Children learned about the role that fish and fishing played in both Native American and pioneer culture. Through the State Department of Nature Resources website, a representative was contacted from the local fish hatchery. He shared the history of local fish, and students observed the dissection of a fish. He discussed fish reproduction and shared the role of the fish hatchery in ensuring that the rivers and lakes were stocked for those who enjoy fishing.

Technology Tip: Why reinvent the wheel? Search for handouts and how-to documents to supplement your inquiries and extend experiences. Use Google Images to find useful illustrations and activity sheets. For instance, a search for “fish anatomy labeled” returned many useful results.

7. MUSIC AND DANCING: MAKERSPACES

People of all ages enjoy makerspaces and making music. Connect these two activities with a music theme for interdisciplinary learning and family fun. Youth learned that the Southern Paiute people who lived in the area during the 19th century made and played many types of musical instruments.

Working with a local artist and hunter, children created flutes, rasps, drums, and rattles using locally sourced materials including fresh elk skins and wood. The techniques used to build



Figure 8. Fish dissection STEM connection

the instruments were much like those followed for centuries by the Southern Paiute tribe.

Online music sources allowed children to listen to music played by Southern Paiute and other Native American musicians.

The music makerspace idea was

expanded for a community dinner event where members of the community were invited to create instruments while a local band played pioneer-era music. Youth brought their drums and played in a traditional drum circle as part of the dinner event.

Technology Tip: Rather than a general search for Native American mu-

sic, search within music sources and services. For instance, **SoundCloud** <<https://soundcloud.com>> is a useful website for locating music.

8. DAIRY, MILK, AND CHEESE: USING HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

Many early settlers found that cheese



Figure 9. Making drums

was a product they could make and easily transport over long distances. In the summers, local teens would leave their parents and spend the summer at cheese camps in the mountains, where they'd milk dairy cows twice per day and make cheese. Diaries written by young adults provide fascinating insights into the lives of these cheese makers. In many cases, cheese camp romances developed between youth living at the camps.

Technology Tip: A search for “historical diaries” yields many sources

of diaries, journals, and letters online. Connect locally written diaries with well-known diaries such as **Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl.**

9. ORCHARDS, JAMS, AND PIES: USING AUDIO AND VIDEO COLLECTIONS

Apple, peach, and pear orchards were planted by the early pioneers. The tradition of picking and preserving fruit is part of local history in many areas.

Although historical photos are useful in cultural heritage projects, audio and video collections can bring the past to life in a different way. National projects such as **Story Corps** <<https://storycorps.org>> and the **Veterans History Project** <<https://www.loc.gov/vets/>> are well-known examples. However, there are also local and state-level projects available.

The **National Park Service** <<https://bit.ly/29ryXHu>> maintains multimedia collections associated with

park and historic sites. For instance, dozens of oral history audio clips share life in the early 20th century from the perspective of early farmers and ranchers. Children were asked to compare their lives with those of people who grew up tending the Fruita, Utah, orchards.

Technology Tip: Working in small groups, ask children to listen to a short oral history clip. Provide two or three prompts to jumpstart their discussions.

10. STORYTELLING, CAMPFIRES, AND THE NIGHT SKY: USING INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS

From building a campfire to making a dreamcatcher, instructional videos are an effective way to help students learn useful skills. They are also helpful in connecting parents with resources that the whole family can enjoy.

The Sparking Humanities project was able to purchase telescopes that were circulated through the public library. Instructional videos were used as a way to help families learn how to use the telescopes to learn more about their heritage of dark skies.

Technology Tip: Search **YouTube** to find ideas for making tin can lanterns, identifying constellations in the night sky, or setting up a telescope.

11. HONEY, BEES, AND BEEKEEPING: USING DATA SETS

Many pioneers brought honey bees when settling new areas. Bees provided honey and are important pollinators for crops.

With the focus on STEM, data literacy has become a hot topic the past several years. Historical and current government surveys from the **United**

States Department of Agriculture <<https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/>> can be used to explore changes in farming and ranching over time. Involve youth in making charts and graphs to show shifts in agriculture through local history.

Technology Tip: When seeking data for analysis, use terms such as “data,” “surveys,” and “infographics.” For instance, a Google Image search for “honey bee infographics” provides dozens of fascinating visualizations. Use the references they provide for more in-depth analysis.

12. QUILTS AND QUILTING: INVOLVING FAMILIES

Many traditions of arts and crafts are being lost. The cultural heritage project was designed to bring generations together in the hopes of nurturing some of these traditions in the next generation.

Working with local partners including Cooperative Extension and 4-H, the public library, and the National Park Service, the project offered after-school classes and community dinners as culminating projects for each theme. Individual children and families shared the quilts they produced during the afterschool program at the community dinner. A showcase included antique quilts alongside contemporary works. Many of these projects were later featured at the county fair.

By including community partners, teacher librarians can expand the scope of the project and have a broader impact.

Technology Tip: Use technology to reach beyond your school. Services such as **MailChimp** <<https://mailchimp.com/>> make sending out mass commu-

nications easy. Use **Facebook** as a way to involve parents and **Instagram** as a way to share what’s happening in your library with the local community.

CONCLUSION

A focus on cultural heritage is an effective way to bring together formal and informal learning. Whether organizing online resources or connecting with local community resources, teacher librarians are able to provide authentic learning experiences while addressing the National School Library Standards, as well as standards across the curriculum.

REFERENCES

AASL (2018). *National school library standards*. Retrieved from <https://standards.aasl.org/school-librarians/>

The Sparking Humanities project was made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Entrada Institute.